

Remarks at the Presentation Ceremony for the National Medal of the Arts

July 22, 1992

Welcome, everybody. Sorry for holding you up for a few minutes here. Welcome to the White House. May I salute Dr. Radice. I don't see Lamar. He was to be here, Lamar Alexander, our Secretary of Education. I think I just left him, and he'll be along. Dr. Lynne Cheney, Members of the Congress, and so many distinguished guests, welcome.

Barbara and I are both delighted to be here and proud to be part of an America which values arts as well as business or science or politics. President Kennedy expressed so well the importance of this ideal when he said, "Roosevelt and Lincoln understood that the life of the arts is very close to the center of a nation's purpose and is a test of the quality of a nation's civilization."

Well, we're here today to pay tribute to some extraordinary men and women, men and women of genius and passion who enrich that quality of life in our America. "Made in U.S.A." has a new meaning today, for almost all these artists were born in small American towns, trained here in their own country, then turned this uniquely American vision to a wide range of artistic fields. Because of their vision, today we celebrate the sheer and priceless pleasure of being American.

For some, being American means being born into a certain regional tradition with the talent to preserve that legacy and carry it to a wider audience. Earl Scruggs brought the fast and furious banjo-pickin' licks of his bluegrass revolution from Flint Hill, North Carolina, to Carnegie Hall. Down the road in Nashville, for over a half a century, a sprightly cracker-barrel philosopher named Minnie Pearl has been dispensing down-home wisdom and a whole lot of down-deep laughter. Jazz pianist Billy Taylor's music, including Jazzmobile Outreach, "makes a joyful noise" and gives a special streetwise swing to this most American form of expression.

For some, being American means striving

to brand the bold spirit of this land onto work that is universal and timeless. American-born and -trained Marilyn Horne not only sings with the passion and precision that embody opera at its grandest, but she also introduced composers such as Handel to audiences here at home. By elevating American choral music to the highest levels of excellence, the sweep of Robert Shaw's work has proclaimed the majesty of God throughout this Nation.

For some, being American means reaching from their roots to touch the Nation on a larger-than-life canvas. Robert Wise brings the perspective of his Indiana childhood to the crafting of movies of imagination and humanity from "The Sound of Music" to "West Side Story." And with the courage and sheer power of his fierce talent, Mississippi's James Earl Jones has stamped his purely American mark on classical roles and created new characters who explore a man's quest for dignity.

I might say on a very personal note, when I saw "The Hunt for Red October" and "Patriot Games," I enjoyed his performance as Director of the CIA, a role that I played briefly myself. *[Laughter]*

For some, being American means flourishing this country's impatient exuberance in the face of dusty tradition. Out of Robert Venturi's genius sprang the post-modern movement of architecture, forever altering the way we see the cities around us. The writings of Denise Scott Brown, his wife and partner, have stimulated the American awareness of architecture as public art.

For some, being American means passionate stewards of the arts, committed to bringing theater, painting, dance, music, and so much more to all kinds of Americans across this country. Millions have been stirred and moved by cultural programming like "Om-nibus," part of the video trails blazed by Robert Saudek, now caretaker to television's legacy at the Museum of Broadcasting.

Two special companies have set the standard in corporate philanthropy. They

give hundreds of grants and millions of dollars, but most importantly, they give the example of believing in the importance of arts for America. The AT&T Foundation supports innovative projects all across the country, ranging from tours by dance companies and ethnic artists to original drama and music composition. The Lila Wallace-Reader's Digest Fund aids American performing, visual, and literary artists who have a real dream, and it also cares for the future, generously funding arts education.

I want to take a moment for a special salute to someone whose work has intrigued me since I first met him here at the White House a couple of years ago. When you talk about being American, nothing can capture the richness and depth of that experience quite like native American art. Not only is it our oldest and proudest tradition, but in native American society, art and life are strands of the same cloth. The ancient patterns on blankets and the dances and the colors: Art is an integral and time-honored part of daily life. So I'm very proud to salute Allan Houser. His hands transform bronze and stone to capture the true meaning of this country's unbroken spirit. His sculptures eloquently echo this Nation's heritage of proud Apache chiefs and speak for the

essential humanity of all Americans.

I firmly believe that our number one goal for the 21st century must be education. The high-tech challenges of this global marketplace we're living in will be absolutely overwhelming. But as we equip our kids with the skills to compete, we also must help them develop as complete human beings. One way to do this is through the arts. For without knowledge of the beauty and depth of the human spirit, our successes are hollow and our lives lacking.

President John Adams wrote this: "I must study politics that my sons may have liberty to study mathematics and philosophy in order to give their children a right to study painting, poetry, and music." That is why we celebrate these men and women today.

Congratulations to all. Thank you for your contributions to the great tapestry that is American art. Now I'd like to ask Dr. Radice to assist me in presenting these medals, if you would.

Note: The President spoke at 12:04 p.m. in the East Room at the White House. In his remarks, he referred to Anne Radice, Acting Chairman, National Endowment for the Arts, and Lynne V. Cheney, Chairman, National Endowment for the Humanities.

Remarks at an Antidrug Rally in Arlington, Virginia

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Reverend, thank you, sir. It is most fitting that a ceremony like this, where we celebrate what a community has done, open its meeting with prayer. I'm proud to be here. My dear friend the Congressman from here, Frank Wolf, he and I came over together, and he was ecstatic in trying to give me the heartbeat of this community and tell me what you all have achieved.

I've read about it, I've seen stories from time to time, but there's nothing like being on the scene to get a real feel. All I will say is that we have got to find various ways with which to win the battle against drugs, and this community is setting an example really for the rest of the Nation.

So what I wanted to do here today was simply turn it over to you all and hear what you've done. This morning I met at the White House with some business leaders, and they're working in the business community to make the business places free of drugs, workplaces drug-free. And they're making progress.

The reduction in cocaine, casual use by teenagers is down by 63 percent in the last 3 years. So you all are making some progress.

But I really came over to not only congratulate you on this, what is it, the second anniversary of the initiation of this project, but to say that the Government couldn't